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ABSTRACT

In the Israeli Kibbutz, the family and the children's house are considered as two joint efforts to provide emotional, social, and intellectual support in the child's life. These two centers are not perceived as antogonistic or even competitive. In each of these systems of social relations are found both satisfaction and frustration, rewards and restraints, fulfillment and despair, joy and sorrow. The very existence of two such centers provides a wider range of choices for children. The practice and theory of the two centers can be considered an important contribution made by the educational system of the Kibbutz to modern education and psychology. In the Kibbutz children are given a sense of the necessity of being productive before being creative, of being active before being a user, of being involved before being a critic, of being responsible before being selfish, and of joining forces before being competitive. The differences between the Kibbutz and other educational systems are differences in values. Thus the results of different educational systems are difficult to compare. (Author/SS)

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Two Education Centers:

Reflections on Early Childhood Education in the Israeli Kibbutz

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History rarely provides the opportunity to create an educational system from the very beginning of the community. This fortunate event happened to the Kibbutz movement, the collective agro-industrial settlements which began their pioneering work 70 years ago. They started as a group of youngsters for whom the first families - and the first children - were an event of extraordinary significance that gave their communities a deep sense of togetherness, of belonging, of shared responsibilities. It was the beginning of a forever ongoing search and confrontation where the facts of life - and very hard facts, indeed - had to be met, confronted and changed according to social ideals and hopes. The system of collective education, as it exists today in 240 settlements with a total population of ca. 120.000 people, takes care of about 12 thousand children in early childhood and pre-school age.

One of the basic pedagogic and psychological principles of collective education is the community's responsibility for the education of the children - from birth to adolescence. I do not know of any other modern society where family and community share their joint effort of education in such close, direct and mutual patterns. Usually, people know a number of things about early childhood education in the Israeli Kibbutz: that the children live in children houses, spend only a few hours a day with their parents and live in groups under the supervision, guidance and care of a metapelet - the care giver. I would call these "surface criteria", easily observable. The basic, deep educational components, however, are altogether different. They consist of a different social value system of the grown-ups living in the Kibbutz. Collective Education - as Kibbutz education is called - is named "collective" not because children live in groups but because the grown-ups

live a collective life. The forever repeated question by human-behavior scientists is: "Is this education good for the children?" Back in 1956, the late Prof. D. Rappaport had already answered this question and said: "The scientific question is not whether collective education is good or bad. Even if that were the question, we would have to ask further, good or bad for whom and for what? The problem is: What traditional, historical, organisational, institutional and economic forces find their unnoted expression in the form of collective education and how do these forms of upbringing induce behavior forms (social modalities) and behavior problems which in their genetic sequence result in individuals who perpetuate the way of life of the Kibbutz?" (D.R., Collected Papers, p. 720, Basic Books).

We consider the family and the children's house as two emotional social and intellectual centers in the child's life. In the western society the two centers are usually perceived as antagonistic or even competitive. The many efforts to bridge the gap between these centers in the western society provide ample evidence of this situation. In the Kibbutz the two centers are an expression of joint efforts of the family and the community to educate the children. It is a joint effort because it reflects the way of life of the grown-ups who have their family apartment and the communal dining room which complement each other. Sometimes people ask us which place the child considers his home: His parents' apartment or his children-house? The answer: his Kibbutz. To ask a question like this shows the difficulty people have in considering the two centers as an entity and not as antagonistic as they are used to. The children, in any case, never ask a question like this. For them the Kibbutz community is their home and togetherness a

way of life. The children express this very clearly. Toddlers may ask a stranger not "what is your name" but "to whom do you belong?" meaning who is your family and who is your metapelet and which is your group? There seems to occur a fusion of images which is a well-known psychological phenomenon. Kibbutz-born grown-ups, when asked about their childhood memories, tend to fuse the images of mother and metapelet into two -- a good one and a bad one. The good one has all the good components of the mother and some of the metapelet, and the same goes for the bad memories. This does not mean, of course, that there are no conflicts or rivalries - latent or open - between the various components of the educational process. But the resolution of the conflicts is not a "partition of forces" but rather in the direction of "joining forces" which gives the educational system a different flavor.

Another frequent question concerns the child's relation with his family. All kinds of research results have been presented. Some show that the relations are very balanced, but lack emotional depth. Others show that these relations have all the known conflicts in the western family, but that identifications are deep and that of all ideal figures, the parents are the most important. Allow me to be sceptical about these investigations and their results, whatever they are. Most of them are lost in generalisations, a few of them may be correct but do not differentiate between social influences and individual factors. Anyhow, do we in the behavioral sciences possess an objective yardstick to measure each part of the social and individual ingredients which together create the behavior and happiness of human beings? I doubt this. I would prefer to speak about the balance and proportions of satisfactions and frustrations an individual gets from his family, from

his community, his work, and his activities. In each of these systems of relations we find both satisfaction and frustration, rewards and restraints, fulfillment and despair, joy and sorrow. In an individualistic society you may get trapped in one of these relations - whereas in a collective society there is always a natural intrabalance in addition to the interbalance. If for some individual reason the balance in the family tends towards the frustration - which may sometimes happen in and to all families - then the questions arises: What can and does the community do in order to push the balance toward satisfaction to help, to assist and comfort by deliberate efforts or by the very existence of alternative ways of relations and different balances of satisfactions and frustrations? If we approach the questions from this point of view, some advantages of the collective way of life become immediately apparent. The very existence of two emotional, social and intellectual centers opens choices of possibilities. Everyone will agree that at both centers the child will find satisfactions and frustrations. Frustrations in the educational process are unavoidable. But if the child has one center for his relationships - he has no choice. Even if he has different centers in the non-Kibbutz society, they are separate, do not form an entity, are two different worlds and sometimes antithetical. But if the child has two centers which are founded on an equal basis, then the very possibility of choice may defuse the might of frustration and may limit the exaggerations of satisfactions, to a degree the child can deal with successfully.

I do believe that the practice and theory of the two centers can be considered as an important contribution made by the educational system of the Kibbutz to modern education and psychology. It was, indeed, a long journey from Bowlby's theories to J. Kagan's statements that "it

seems fair to conclude that the day care and home-reared children developed similarly with respect to cognitive, social and affective qualities during the first three years of life." (J.K., Infancy, p. 259, H.U.P. 1978). If we take into account that the children-houses in the Kibbutz are not just day care centers but an expression of the way of life of the grown-ups and that the care-givers are trained, supervised and guided by local and central educational committees - then we may conclude that not only is Bowlby's statement incorrect, but that Kagan's rather neutral statement is not enough either. One should not put the question: Center or Family, Center vs. Family, but always how do both supplement, correct, help each other.

The children's house and group is not an anonymous institution. It has at its core the metapelet, the care giver. She takes care of 3 babies, or 4-6 toddlers. If education has to introduce children into the basics of human culture, it has to provide them first of all with three elements: food, clothes, shelters. These three were given to our children first, whatever the economic conditions were. But after these other essentials have to be introduced, namely knowledge of tradition and tradition of knowledge, skills of work and work of skills, structures of activities and activities of structures. These are the motors of development.

We do, therefore, consider our children-houses not as institutions where children are taken care of by alien professionals. Our children-houses are their home, their region of life and development where the children live and play, eat and sleep, work and create - a whole life cycle, just like their parents'. I do believe that a serious problem of modern society lies in its being a consumer society. There even

education is big business. You sell knowledge, you use pre-prepared instant lectures, and even pop-psychology tries to intervene in education. In order to adorn this dull system, the worship of creativity came into existence. The educational system of the Kibbutz was and is open to these influences of the surrounding society. However, we try to give our children a sense of necessity to be productive before being creative, to be active before being a user, to be involved before being a critic, to join forces before being competitive, to be responsible before being selfish.

Hope, will, purpose, competence - these are the 4 virtues Erik Erikson tells us about as growing out of early childhood years. "Without them" - he says - "all other values and goodnesses lack vitality". In order to achieve these virtues we try to trust the vitality and wisdom of children's activities, the closeness of the grown-ups' ideas with the educational practices, the identity of the collective way of life with the basic human needs. If we consider the quantity - if not always the quality - of the many investigations into the Kibbutz education published in the USA, Japan, Germany, England and other countries by psychologists, anthropologists, educators and others, we must come to the conclusion that there seems to be in modern society a desperate need to look for alternative ways of early childhood education. This need seeks answers to the many frustrations society faces with family life, with mass life in the mega-cities, with integration of more and more up-rooted people wandering over the globe looking for peace and a place to start a new life, with more and more children deprived of their basic rights, so generously granted them by Unesco. Although I believe - with over 40 years experience as a Kibbutz member - that the

Kibbutz creates indeed an alternative way of life, and a better one - it can not be said that our educational practices can be copied and transferred easily into other societies. But with all due modesty we may say that the collective educational system has contributed to modern psychology and education some view points, practices and reflections. I may mention the following topics:

It is impossible to speak about Collective Education in Early Childhood without mentioning the care-giver - or the Metapelet, as we call her. She is not the traditional "nanny" nor is she a mother substitute; she is not the professional nurse. She is not the shepherd who took care of Laius' and Jocasta's deserted son. She is all this and much more: She is a member of the Kibbutz, she creates the home atmosphere of the child's house. She is one main factor in the process of socialisation. She is constantly engaged in the reciprocal process of interaction of childrens needs, activities and competencies with the ever widening circle of their physical and social surroundings. She is not a hired worker but a member of the same collective settlement as the child's parents and family. Most of them have professional training, 60% of them are themselves born and raised in the Kibbutz. This is our "educational infantry" - and their secret is their love for their children, their home and community - combined with their social commitment. Care, Commitment, Competence create a structure with a special flavor, are a reliable source from which children get trust and confidence which does introduce them into a world where they will need all their strength just to exist.

The Kibbutz family is a modern style family with an average of three children. Prof. Heinsohn (see G. H., Menschenproduktion,

Suhrkamp, 1979) notes this fact - which is very different from the one-child or non-child western family as a proof of the relevance of the educational system. The role of the family, the role of children's groups, processes of identity formation and ego strength - these are some of the fields where generally accepted views of psychological development in the western world had to be changed due to the Kibbutz educational reality. The implication seems to be clear: early childhood educational practices and theories are an outcome of the grown-ups' way of life. Every society uses its children to define itself. The Kibbutz society, and least, declares this openly and proudly.

How to judge the results of our education? We have in the Kibbutz now a third and fourth generation. A true educator is never satisfied with the outcome of his system, even if he is satisfied with each child. A child is not a statistic - as a president of the USA once said. It is a question of ethics, a way of life, a declaration of confidence and forever a belief in a better human society. The results of different educational systems and approaches are difficult to compare. You cannot measure them - but you can see, feel and observe them. It is clear that the differences are in values, virtues, judgements. It is a difference in living one's life and spending one's childhood. If we do provide our children with a happy childhood with deep roots in their community, belief in their competence and a sense of responsibilities for their fellow human beings - then we may say that we indeed do what we preach, preach what we believe, believe what we do -- with conscience, without fear - forever as guides and mentors for new generations to come.